DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 262 RC 017 377

AUTHOR Costello, Phillip M.
TITLE Starting A Program.
PUB DATE Oct 88
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Experiential Education (16th, Carbondale, IL, October 13-16, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adventure Education; *Camping; Guidelines; *Planning; *Program Development

ABSTRACT

Many instructors and managers of adventure programs come to a time in their careers when they consider starting a program. In all cases, such a consideration begins with an idea. Evaluation of an idea's feasibility involves: (1) development of a program description that includes goals and objectives; (2) review of the proposal by others; (3) research on the need and desire for the proposed program; and (4) consideration of possible partners. After the decision to proceed has been made, an organizational structure must be chosen. There are good and bad points to each of the common options: incorporating as a profit-making corporation, incorporating as a nonprofit corporation, operating under the "umbrella" of a larger organization, or operating within an arrangement with several schools. Before beginning operations, the program developer must meet state legal requirements, establish an advisory board, develop diverse funding possibilities, focus on primary and secondary clients, make personal contact with potential clients, research possible locations for the program, run a series of 1-day invitational programs, and seek advice from others in the field. Many new outdoor programs fail due to limited capital investment and poor management. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315262

STARTING A PROGRAM

by

Phil Costello

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Phillip M. Costello

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC017377

STARTING A PROGRAM

Many individuals involved in instructing and managing adventure programs reach a point in their career when they consider the possibility of starting their own program. In some cases, usually after being involved with a number of different adventure education programs, and developing different skills along the way, an individual will consider taking on the challenge of starting and managing their own program.

In all cases, considering starting a program begins with an idea.

The Idea Stage

Many individuals reach a point where they have an idea for a program they would like to develop. Some of these ideas will prove to be solid and should be developed, others will need a lot of adjustment and still others should be dropped.

How do you know if your idea has a good chance of making it?

1. Develop and write your first program description. Include a clear and specific purpose of your idea as well as goals and objectives.

2. Put together a list of six to eight people you would like to have review your idea. Send them your written description in advance, then meet with them and discuss your idea in detail. Ask each of these individuals to suggest others who should review your idea.

3. Find out if any groups, organizations or individuals in your area are already involved in activities similar to your idea.

4. Do some basic research to find out if the services you want to offer are needed.

5. Begin to think about whether or not you want to have one or more partners to help develop your idea.

6. Review your work thus far and rewrite your program description.

Action Plan

If you consider all of the information discussed thus far and you feel ready to further develop your idea, you will need to begin to consider some of the organizational options.

There are a wide range of possible ways to structure a program. Following are points to consider regarding four options:

1. Incorporate as a profit-making corporation.

good points

- maximum amount of control
- you could develop a marketable business and eventually sell it at a profit
- better chance of getting back any personal investment.

bad points

- very difficult to obtain funding from private foundations
- some school systems and organizations prefer working with non-profits
- will not qualify for surplus food and equipment
- tax payments.

2. Incorporate as a non-profit corporation.

good points

- tax exempt status
- donations are tax deductible
- bulk mailing permit
- eligible for surplus government food and equipment
- eligible for private foundation funding
- high degree of control.

bad points

- limited lobbying ability
- Board of Trustees control overall program
- regulation of earnings and fees
- if corporation dissolves, all assets must be given to another non-profit.

3. Develop your program under the 'umbrella' of a larger organization.

A number of successful organizations were initiated as smaller programs operating under the umbrella of larger existing corporations with the 'goal' of eventually 'spinning-off' to become their own program.

In each state there are a number of private educational corporations that are involved with contracting with the federal and state governments for their services. Once your written program is refined, locate a private educational corporation in your area and present your idea to them. You may want to seek out a corporation with a strong network of contacts, that would be helpful to you for developing your program, but one that is not heavily involved in experiential education, but is receptive to the concept.

This arrangement could be beneficial to the larger corporation as well as it would give them a new service to market.

good points

- fairly easy to initiate
- least difficult way to obtain proper insurance coverage
- very efficient way to develop a client market
- highly probable that you will survive first two years
- good intermediate step to being on your own.

bad points

- you will not have complete control of your operation
- could be difficult to disengage and 'spin-off' on your own, especially if your program is successful.

This option has a great deal of potential, but problems can occur if there is not a clear agreement regarding expectations, ownership of assets, long-range planning, anbd accumulated deficits or surpluses.

4. Develop your idea in a tri-school arrangement.

Sell your idea to three or four schools or a mixture of several schools and a college or university. Base your program in one of the schools and provide services to each school.

Develop a 'menu' of all the possible program ideas including services to special needs groups: potential dropouts, disruptive and disabled students.

good points

- client base in central area
- potential for impact
- community based.

bad points

- you would have to sell three schools in same general area
- if one of the schools wouldn't adopt your program, you might have to incorporate
- change in school administration could change status.

3. Getting off the ground.

Once you determine the direction you want to go with your idea, such as, incorporating as a private, non-profit corporation, you will be anxious to get started and will want to jump in with both feet immediately. However, it is recommended to work for one full year prior to going operational. A preferred arrangement would be to have a full-time position and a stable financial base

for the year before going on your own.

'Pre-flight' checklist

A. If you decide to incorporate, check with state officials to identify all legal requirements for proper compliance. Requirements for profit and non-profit corporations vary from state to state.

B. Begin to develop an advisory board of key individuals that are interested in your program. Eventually you will want representatives from law, banking, medicine, education, fund raising, etc.

C. Develop diverse funding possibilities rather than relying on one or two sources. Explore federal, state, private foundations, donations and client sources for developing an income base.

D. Most private foundations will not support a new organization for several years, but if they think you are a potential candidate for funding, they will watch the progress of your program.

E. Select primary and secondary clients on which you would like to focus.

- public elementary, middle and secondary schools
- independent schools
- colleges/universities
- alternate education programs
- special populations: emotionally disturbed, developmentally disabled, physically handicapped, etc.
- Teacher Training
- Juvenile Justice system: corrections, probation, residential centers, youth agencies
- adult and continuing education programs
- youth groups, clubs, church groups, local recreation programs
- families, parent/child
- open enrollment courses for youth/adults
- corporations: management training; employee courses
- military organization/units.

F. Develop and run a series of 1-day invitational programs that will enable key people, including potential funding sources, to meet and spend time with people to whom you plan to offer services.

G. Do not rely on letters, phone calls or mailings to establish yourself with clients. Make it a priority to personally meet and spend time with people to whom you plan to offer services.

H. Seek advice from others in the field before preparing your first public relations materials.

I. If you conduct any programs during your pre-flight stage, be sure they are of the highest quality possible. Begin to develop a reputation as a strong, reliable, professional program regardless of the status of your program.

J. Research possible locations where you will be able to conduct your programs - federal land, state parks and forests and private outdoor centers are possible locations. Some private landowners are more than willing to have programs conducted on their property.

K. Approximately a dozen states have a Camp Safety Act Program usually administered by the State Department of Health. Check to see if your state has a Camp Safety Act Program as this will have a major effect on your program.

4. Considerations.

Many outdoor programs that managed to get off the ground did not last long for two primary reasons: (1) lack of capital to invest in starting up the program; (2) poor overall management of the program.

Capital investment: Obviously, the more money you have to get started, the easier it will be. If your capital is limited and you do not want to take out a bank loan, you can still make it work, but you will need to operate on a strict budget and stick to it. If your capital is limited for start-up, you will need to develop skills for scrounging, bartering, checking out surplus property, and requesting donations from equipment companies.

Management: As your program starts to grow, get to know every aspect inside and out. Find out how much it costs to operate every aspect of your program so you will be able to make decisions to help you survive. As you discover aspects of program management that you don't enjoy, and tend to put off, check yourself to be sure these areas get covered.

Insurance: The insurance market changes every year. During most of the 1980's, it would have been nearly impossible for a new small program to obtain insurance. Currently, in 1988 it is less difficult, but still not a simple task. A good place to start is by contacting other experiential education programs and talking with their insurance agents. Do some shopping. Check out different sized programs from various parts of the country. Some states have regulations regarding the minimum amount of liability insurance required to operate an adventure program.

Scrounging: A great deal can be accomplished through scrounging and bartering. Equipment companies, lumber yards, and corporations are generally willing to help but they should be approached personally. While scrounging can prove beneficial, the down side is that it is time-consuming and sometimes needs to be a low priority for the use of your time.

Be willing to take risks!

Keep your sense of humor!